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May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month

We should all be careful in the great outdoors. Lyme disease is the fastest growing infectious disease worldwide - at present it out paces HIV and West Nile combined. People who are in the dangerous target areas include golfers, campers, hikers, hunters, fisherman and farmers. These groups tend to spend more time in the danger zones with longer grasses and moist type wetlands. This is prime ground for the ticks that harbour Lyme disease.

Lyme disease is an infection caused primarily by the bite of an infected tick. It was once thought that we did not have the species of ticks that carry this disease in this area, but as it turns out we do. It has also been proven that more than one type of tick can be a carrier. There are other vectors of transmission as well. Lyme disease is a cousin to syphilis and can therefore potentially be transmitted sexually, from mother to child via the placenta and breast milk. There is also concern that Lyme disease could be infecting our blood banks in Canada.

Symptoms of Lyme disease can be extensive and that is partly why physi-

cians have a lot of trouble detecting and diagnosing the disease. If you catch this disease in its early stages about four to six weeks of antibiotics are a must. The longer the course of treatment the better, to ensure treatment throughout the bacterium's life cycle. Do not wait for blood tests to turn positive or it may be too late. Lyme blood serology in Canada is substandard, and produces too many false negatives. Lyme disease is best diagnosed and treated clinically.

Early symptoms can, but not always, include any of the following:

- flu like symptoms
- sore muscles and aches
- sore major joints such as the knees
- headaches and stiff neck
- rash - blotchy red or target type (Note: If odd looking rash is detected get photos of this area and hang on to them for possible future problems)

When Lyme disease gets to its chronic stages, all the problems occur for the patient and the doctor. There is a battle going on in the medical community over the very existence of chronic Lyme. If you suspect that

you might have this debilitating disease you are best to seek out the help of a LLMD (Lyme literate medical doctor) or a Lyme disease support group. LLMDs are at a premium in Canada as the ones that have tried to help patients in the past have been harassed by the colleagues who retire or lose their medical privileges.

Symptoms of Chronic Lyme (late stage) can include:

- chronic fatigue
- fibromyalgia
- bipolar or depression
- short term memory loss
- getting lost or going to wrong places
- heart palpitations
- increased sensitivity to the effects of alcohol, even in small amounts
- headaches and neck aches
- reoccurring bladder infections
- rash that comes and goes
- muscle twitching
- migrating pain (pain that is in one spot one minute and somewhere else the next)

The above lists are only some of the main symptoms. There are many more. You can get a detailed checklist at www.

canlyme.org. This is the Canadian Lyme Disease Foundation's website. It is invaluable if you suspect Lyme and are looking for some educated help.

Lyme disease can be confused or misdiagnosed as other diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis, ALS (Lou Gehrig's), Fibromyalgia, Alzheimer's, Bipolar, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and depression, to name a few. It is important in any case to educate yourself - you may be more informed than the attending physician after a short bit of research.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. Organizations like Canlyme are very serious about establishing a Canadian made system for Lyme disease detection and treatment. We also have an Ontario group, LAG (Lyme Action Group) lobbying the governments for some much needed help. You can contact them at LymeActionGroup@gmail.com.

For local assistance with Lyme, or if you have something that sounds suspicious, you can contact:

GTA Lyme Disease Support Group
 kpoulios@hbwi.ca.

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